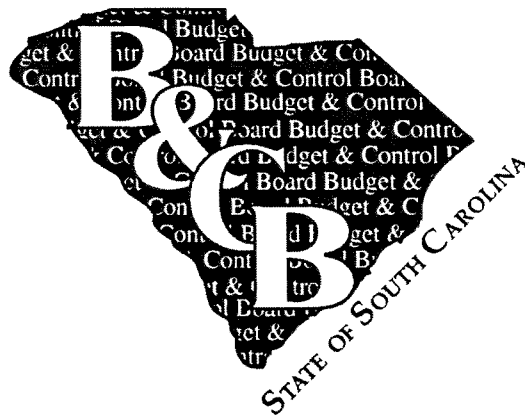


May 21, 2004

State Government News Summary



**Prepared by the Budget and Control Board
Office of the Executive Director**



Posted on Thu, May. 20, 2004

Senators agree to plan moving Sanford's income tax plan forward

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. - Gov. Mark Sanford's plans to reduce the state's income tax won key support from Republican senators Thursday, but critics have said it benefits the top half of the state's income ladder.

Two dozen of the Senate's 27 GOP members endorsed putting the Senate's version of the income tax reduction measure onto a bill that cleared the House on Wednesday.

The House heavily amended the bill with a variety of tax measures Wednesday, but the Senate will take everything out and insert just the Senate's income tax plan.

That action could come Tuesday, Sen. John Hawkins, R-Spartanburg said.

"I just want to say a big thank you. Period. Exclamation point," Sanford said.

The proposal moves the state's top income tax rate to 4.75 percent from 7 percent over several years. No break would be implemented in years when the state's revenues don't grow by 4 percent or more.

Sanford said the bill is critical for job creation in South Carolina.

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Posted on Thu, May. 20, 2004

Sanford says he questioned tax group on ad targeting Harrell

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. - Gov. Mark Sanford said an ad critical of the House's top budget writer prompted him to call the taxpayer group's leader and his own political consultant.

The ads "were in poor taste," Sanford said Thursday, a day after the ads begin airing.

The ad from Americans for Tax Reform talks about state Rep. Bobby Harrell's push for the Palmetto Bowl and says it is a \$5 million "boondoggle" for taxpayers. Pictures of the Charleston Republican flash on the screen with Harrell's name.

Grover Norquist, the tax group's president, said Wednesday that Harrell's actions became fodder for the association's efforts to curb corporate welfare and pork barrel spending.

Sanford said he has a call into Norquist. "I'm going to have that conversation. I have not had it yet," Sanford said.

Americans for Tax Reform used Red Sea, a political consultant firm run by Jon Lerner, in the ads. Sanford also uses the company.

"One of the first guys I called yesterday afternoon was Jon Lerner, saying 'What is the story with this,'" Sanford said. "His point was 'I ain't working for you. I'm working for Americans for Tax Reform. ... I work for a lot of different people,'"

Sanford added, "That's his prerogative."

The governor said he thinks he will continue to use Red Sea as a consultant.

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Posted on Thu, May. 20, 2004

Study: Military's effect on S.C. businesses tops \$7 billion

SUSANNE M. SCHAFER
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. - Bill Bauer is happy to sell Fort Jackson's soldiers just about anything they need, from high-gloss boot polish to plywood frames that keep drill sergeants' hat brims flat and stiff.

"Probably 75 percent of our business is with the military," said Bauer, assistant manager of the U.S. Patriot Store just outside a main gate at the Army training base.

Bauer's experience is reflected in a recent study showing that some \$7.3 billion in sales are accumulated annually by businesses in the state because of the presence of the U.S. military.

The study, conducted by economist Donald L. Schunk of the University of South Carolina, also says the military supports about 142,000 jobs in the state directly or indirectly.

Of that total, about 54,000 jobs are located on the bases, "while the remainder is spread across virtually every sector of the state's economy," Schunk said.

That figure represents nearly 8 percent of total employment in the state, said Schunk, who also conducts a separate, annual report on South Carolina's economy as a whole.

"Bases around the state fuel economic activity by purchasing goods and services from the local community and by providing income to military and civilian personnel. In addition to those direct impacts ... additional benefits accrue to the state economy because of the military related visitors and retirees they attract," the study said.

Military retirees account for about \$1.3 billion of the \$7.3 billion figure, and almost \$100 million is brought into the state by military related visitors.

Schunk said he conducted the study for a panel established by Gov. Mark Sanford, which is working in advance of the Pentagon's expected release in 2005 of a list targeting military installations for closure.

Schunk said he looked at various industries in the state and found that maintenance and repair facilities garnered more than \$550 million in sales.

Others industries in the top 10 included real estate, health care, restaurants, banks and utilities.

"This shows the ripple effect ... how the payroll of a soldier or civilian employee on a base can go towards the income of a waitress at a local restaurant or to the barber at a local barbershop," Schunk said.

John Brabham, who owns a real estate firm in Sumter near Shaw Air Force Base, knows firsthand the military's effect on a local economy.

Those who buy homes in the region "go out and buy appliances, they buy carpets, they hire subcontractors. ... The trickle-down impact is incredible. They are involved in every facet of our economy," Brabham said. He estimates the base pumps \$750 million to \$850 million annually into the region.

And military men and women don't need to be present for their impact to be felt, Brabham said.

His company manages about 350 properties that have been purchased by service members but are renting them while they are posted elsewhere.

"They are active duty who want to keep the properties and return here some day," he said.

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Posted on Fri, May. 21, 2004

A quick spin: A look at what went down Thursday at the State House

A look at what went down Thursday at the State House:

SENATORS BACK PLAN TO BOBTAIL SANFORD'S INCOME TAX CUT

Gov. Mark Sanford's plans to reduce the state's income tax won key support from Republican senators Thursday, but critics have said it benefits the top half of the state's income ladder.

Two dozen of the Senate's 27 GOP members endorsed putting the Senate's version of the income tax reduction measure onto a bill that cleared the House on Wednesday. The House heavily amended the bill with a variety of tax measures Wednesday, but the Senate next week will take everything out and insert just the Senate's income tax plan.

The proposal would move the state's top income tax rate to 4.75 percent from 7 percent over several years. No break would be implemented in years when state revenues don't grow by 4 percent or more.

SANFORD SAYS HE QUESTIONED TAX GROUP'S ATTACK AD

An ad by a taxpayer group critical of the House's top budget writer was "in poor taste," Gov. Mark Sanford said Thursday.

The Americans for Tax Reform ad talks about state Rep. Bobby Harrell's push for the Palmetto Bowl, calling it a \$5 million "boondoggle." Pictures of the Charleston Republican flash on the screen with Harrell's name.

Grover Norquist, the tax group's president, said Wednesday that Harrell's actions became fodder for the association's efforts to curb corporate welfare and pork barrel spending. Sanford said he has a call in to Norquist.

The group used Red Sea, a political consultant firm run by Jon Lerner, in the ads. Sanford also uses the company and plans to continue to do so.

BICYCLE CAUCUS SPINS ITS WAY INTO THE STATE HOUSE

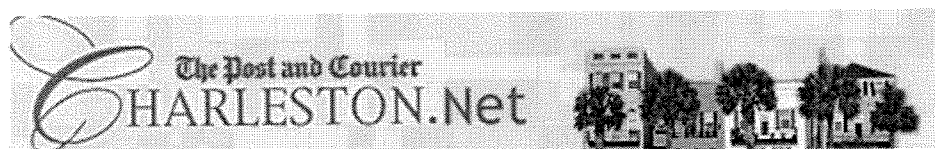
Rep. James Smith, D-Richland, and Sen. John Courson, R-Richland, on Thursday announced the formation of a Legislative Bicycle Caucus, and newly converted cycling enthusiast Gov. Mark Sanford showed up to voice his approval.

Legislators in the Bicycle Caucus will meet a couple of times each year to discuss cycling-related legislation.

The major push this year by cycling enthusiasts was the Safe Routes To School bill, which encourages school districts to make it easier for children to walk or bike to school. It has passed the House and awaits Senate consideration.

Natalie Cappuccio, director of the Palmetto Cycling Coalition, said next year she hopes to gain legislative support for a toll-free line cyclists can call to report and track incidents of drivers' running cyclists off roads or tossing trash at them. The coalition also will continue to lobby for more bike lanes on state highways.

From Staff and Wire Reports



Keep consumers at forefront

The state Senate should be wary of a bill that will enable easier rate hikes for natural gas companies that are regulated by the state Public Service Commission. That will almost certainly make them more frequent and likely add to their cumulative impact.

State Consumer Advocate Elliot Elam describes the proposal as "a solution to a problem that doesn't exist," noting that the two gas utilities that operate in South Carolina already benefit from provisions for automatic rate adjustments caused by fluctuations in the bulk cost of natural gas and the level of demand caused by winter weather.

The House bill, approved in April, is prefaced with an explanation about the difficulties created for the industry by the current requirement to petition the PSC for rate hikes, bringing into play what is described as a costly and cumbersome rate-making procedure.

"Proceedings under existing provisions of law tend to create more perceived economic hardship for consumers and engender more public controversy than would smaller and more regular rate adjustments spread over a number of years," the bill states. Mr. Elam, however, estimates the cost of rate proceedings represents only 0.0002 percent of customer rates.

The proposal would have the industry submit data related to rate hike requests for review by the PSC staff, which would make a recommendation to the commission. It would require the state to conduct "nearly continuous examination" of industry data, Mr. Elam says. Commissioner Mignon Clyburn tells us that the bill would require the PSC to hire two staffers to deal with the routine rate hike requests.

The bill is opposed by the S.C. Small Business Chamber of Commerce, representing some 10,000 merchants. Chamber President Frank Knapp said its regulations aren't adequate to ensure that consumers get a fair shake.

The current rate-making procedure provides a public forum for the industry to make its case, and for consumer advocates and other opponents to counter them.

The PSC has been criticized in the past for being too cozy with regulated utilities. Reform measures to improve consumer protection and commission credibility enacted this year shouldn't be undercut by legislation that eases rate increases for a regulated industry not subject to regular market forces.

The Legislature should ensure that consumers are protected, and that the

voices of their advocates aren't muted through a streamlined rate-making process primarily serving the convenience of the industry.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.charleston.net/stories/052104/edi_21edit2.shtml



Posted on Fri, May. 21, 2004

Hollings stands by his column

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen. Fritz Hollings took to the Senate floor Thursday to defend himself against charges he had written an anti-Semitic newspaper column.

"I won't apologize for this column; I want them to apologize to me," the Charleston Democrat said of his critics. "Talking about 'anti-Semitic.' They're not getting by with it."

Hollings, who retires in January after 38 years in the Senate, went on to blame President Bush for the war in Iraq. He said U.S. policy in the Middle East had unfortunately put Israel in "terrible jeopardy."

The Anti-Defamation League, a prominent Jewish civil rights group, had taken Hollings to task for writing that Israel and President Bush's desire to court Jewish voters were the reasons for the war in Iraq.

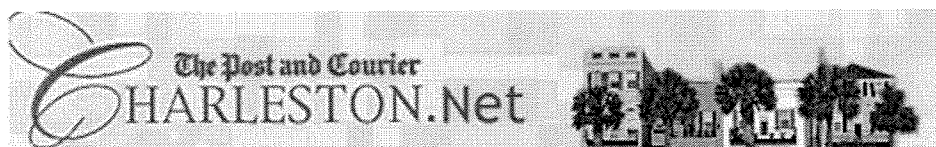
A Columbia rabbi, Philip Silverstein, said he was "horrified" by Hollings' remarks.

ADL president Abraham Foxman said Hollings' writings were reminiscent of age-old conspiracy theories against Jews that had resulted in their persecution.

Hollings' column appeared earlier this month in The State and two other S.C. newspapers.

— By Lauren Markoe

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Graham, Hollings clash on SRS cleanup

Radioactive sludge's future at heart of issue

BY BO PETERSEN

Of The Post and Courier Staff

South Carolina's two U.S. senators squared off on the Senate floor Thursday over the future of the sludge from more than 30 million gallons of radioactive liquid being removed from the Savannah River Site.

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham wants a provision to the national nuclear waste cleanup law that allows the U.S. Department of Energy to re-classify the sludge. That would allow the waste to be buried on site rather than having it moved to deep mountain storage, which the law originally required.

"We spent a lot of money; we've done very little cleanup. And from a taxpayer point of view, the longer you put this off the more it costs and the more damage can be done," Graham said on the Senate floor. "Regulators in South Carolina have come up with a plan ... that will clean these tanks up and close them that is environmentally sound, in my opinion."

Democratic Sen. Fritz Hollings calls the provision "surreptitious" and "an environmental disaster in the offing."

"This is a highly dangerous procedure. It is wrong for the state of South Carolina. It is wrong for the nation. It is wrong for the Department of Energy," Hollings said.

Both Graham and Hollings cited state Department of Health and Environmental Control officials whom the senators said agreed with them.

In a 2003 letter to Hollings, DHEC deputy commissioner Lewis Shaw said the agency does not think it's "technically or economically feasible to send all of the high-level waste to a national repository," but said the state should have a role in deciding how much could remain on site.

A DHEC spokeswoman forwarded the letter to The Post and Courier when asked for the department's position.

The senators disagree on whether the provision's legal language provides that role.

Hollings said Gov. Mark Sanford didn't approve of the provision unless it protected the state.

"We believe it's a good bill," said Sanford spokesman Will Folks. Folks said

the provision is a compromise but that the governor asked for DHEC oversight and got it.

Graham tacked the provision onto a U.S. Department of Defense spending bill now before the Senate. The House of Representatives already has passed a version of the amendment without Graham's provision. A Senate-House conference committee must produce a third version to go back to both chambers for approval.

The waste is being removed from 51 aging tanks at the federal Cold War-era bomb-making plant near Aiken. It's earmarked for burial at Yucca Mountain, Nev.

The language change would clean up the site 23 years ahead of schedule and save taxpayers nearly \$16 billion, Graham said in an earlier statement.

Hollings said earlier that the provision overturns 30 years of law, interferes with an ongoing lawsuit over nuclear waste handling and could have long-term consequences for handling nuclear waste.

"Senator Graham wants to give the Department of Energy the ability to keep going" with the removal "to get the most dangerous material out of the state quicker," said Graham spokesman Kevin Bishop. "There's going to be some residual material. The cost and risk of taking the tanks out are very, very high."

Bishop said the removal has been stalled by the lawsuit.

Karen Wayland, legislative director for the environmental advocate Natural Resources Defense Council that filed the lawsuit, disagreed. The 8 percent of sludge to be buried with the tanks in concrete and grout could hold as much as 55 percent of the radioactivity, she said.

"We're talking about all these isotopes that are the heaviest. At some point those underground tanks are going to corrode, and the groundwater is moving right into the Savannah River."

Graham's legislation gives DOE the authority to leave on site any type and any amount of waste deemed too difficult or expensive to remove, she said.

Removal of the liquid at SRS can continue while the lawsuit is decided, she said.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.charleston.net/stories/052104/loc_21srs.shtml



Posted on Fri, May. 21, 2004

Six people to get state NAACP awards

Biden will address group tonight

By ELLYDE ROKO
Staff Writer

The state NAACP will honor six individuals tonight at its annual Freedom Fund Celebration.

Selected for their commitment to furthering the goals of the NAACP, the honorees will receive NAACP Presidential Citations, said Lonnie Randolph, state president of the civil rights organization.

"Everyone that we recognized has shown a great interest in the cause of freedom for all individuals, and the things that they do in the community are the things that the NAACP stands for," he said.

U.S. Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., will speak at the annual event.

The state NAACP will honor:

- Sue Berkowitz, director of Appleseed Legal Justice Center, for legislative advocacy
- Armand Derfner, of Derfner, Altman and Wilborn in Charleston, for equal justice advocacy
- Vince Ford, Richland 1 school board chairman and vice president of Palmetto Health Alliance, for civic leadership
- Lewis Graham, pastor at Zion Baptist Church, for faith leadership
- John Monk, a news columnist at The State, for "truth telling in journalism"
- Brandolyn Pinkston, administrator of the S.C. Department of Consumer Affairs, for economic justice advocacy

"To do something in the community that the NAACP believes is worthy is a phenomenal accomplishment in my opinion," Ford said. "It's an organization that works without praise, without a lot of money, but has a very important mission."

The organization also will recognize Wachovia for its corporate commitment to promoting the values of the NAACP.

This year, the event will focus on recognizing the landmark Brown v. Board of Education decision, which was handed down 50 years ago this week.

"There have been a lot more promises than progress and most of the promises have been broken," Randolph said.

Tickets, which cost \$75, are available at the door. The event starts with a reception at 5:30 p.m. at Bible Way Church of Atlas Road, 2440 Atlas Road.

Reach Roko at (803) 771-8409 or eroko@thestate.com.



Posted on Fri, May. 21, 2004

Bill clarifies rules for wrecks involving police

Measure to ensure fair investigations nears passage in S.C. Legislature

By CLIF LeBLANC
Staff Writer

A bill that would strengthen independent investigations of police officers involved in traffic collisions is close to passage in the Legislature, its backers said Thursday.

The bill more clearly spells out when and how outside agencies must investigate such wrecks.

"This is a much-needed improvement," Sen. Brad Hutto, D-Orangeburg, said of the bill that is intended to stop the widespread practice of police not applying a 1994 law designed to prevent the appearance of favoritism for law enforcement over private motorists.

Starting with the Highway Patrol, which investigates more wrecks than local agencies, police interpreted the 10-year-old law to apply only when law enforcement vehicles make physical contact with another vehicle or property.

That exempted wrecks resulting from police chases when the cruiser did not strike anything but the pursuit led to a collision.

Such a situation occurred last year when Beverly Meyers 50, died after a Forest Acres police chase.

An inquiry by The State newspaper into the circumstances of Meyers' May 27, 2003, death led to questions about the objectivity of police investigations.

Forest Acres police chased a suspected check counterfeiter through a neighborhood at speeds up to 65 mph. The suspect ran a stop sign and struck a car in which Meyers was riding.

Because a Forest Acres cruiser did not strike the station wagon carrying Meyers, the Highway Patrol declined to investigate, citing its interpretation of the law, said Jeff Moore, director of the S.C. Sheriffs' Association. The association supports changing the law.

That left the Forest Acres Police Department to investigate its own officers' conduct. It subsequently cleared them, but has not disclosed its findings, Chief Gene Sealy said. Pursuit policy changes are being considered.

Critics — including the author of the original law, then-Sen. Larry Richter, and the attorney general's office — said the patrol and other police agencies have been misinterpreting the law.

To settle the dispute, sheriffs around the state pushed for the current bill.

It flew through the House with barely an objection, said Rep. Jim Harrison, R-Richland, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee.

A Senate Judiciary subcommittee narrowed the scope of the bill, which has received two of three required votes in the Senate.

A final Senate vote could occur next week. But the House must approve the Senate's changes. Supporters are optimistic the bill will pass.

Sealy, the Forest Acres chief, said he supports the bill because it clarifies when an independent investigation must occur and mandates taking statements from witnesses who saw the collision but were not involved in it.

Those witnesses would become watchdogs for police misconduct, he said.

This week, supporters plan to merge the proposal with two other law enforcement bills in order to get them approved in the waning days of the session, according to Hutto, Moore, and Laura Hudson of the state crime victim advocates' organization.

"We're not doing this to kill this bill," Hutto said of piggybacking the legislation.

Highway Patrol spokesman Sid Gaulden said the agency would discuss the legislation only if it becomes law.

Moore said sheriffs have taken a public position to improve the widely misunderstood 1994 law and plan to see the legislation through.

"I don't intend to let (the bill) die," said Moore, who doubles as lobbyist for the state's 46 sheriffs. "It's too important."

Independent investigations provide credibility that police are not treated differently from private motorists, Moore said.

Sen. Larry Martin, R-Pickens, won a change in the House-passed version, which he said was too broad.

The House wanted to ban police from investigating their own wrecks when the collision occurred during "a police action."

Martin said defense attorneys could twist that broad term. Lawyers could blame their clients' erratic driving, Martin said, on a police action triggered merely by a "be-on-the-lookout" bulletin for suspects.

"I just want to make sure we're not creating a trap for law enforcement," said Martin, who chairs the Senate subcommittee that reviewed the bill.

The proposed law also requires police to question witnesses who see police-involved wrecks.

Meyers' daughter, Renee Kozlowski, is surprised by that provision, though she supports the bill.

"Why does it even have to be in the law?" Kozlowski asked of the witness-questioning provision. "I would think that would be a given."

Still, she said, "I'm glad that finally — if this is what it has to come to — that it is spelled out who has to investigate and what they have to do when the police are involved and the collision leads to a death."

Kozlowski said the 21-year sentence that motorist Andre Roach received in her mother's death helped the family heal.

But she resents Forest Acres police for chasing a nonviolent offender.

"They knew where this man lived. They had his license plate. They knew his rap sheet.

"It just seems their persona is like cowboys and Indians," Kozlowski said. "They need to pull back."

Longtime crime victim advocate Hudson accepts the altered version of the bill, which she said has "much stronger language."

But, "I don't think it goes quite far enough. I think there needs to be another bill that covers other actions by law enforcement (besides pursuits). That may be another bill for next year."

Reach LeBlanc at (803) 771-8664 or cleblanc@thestate.com.



Posted on Fri, May. 21, 2004

Bill frees DOT from wetlands protection

Agency says measure would speed road projects; others fear effects on water, wildlife

By SAMMY FRETWELL
Staff Writer

A state agency with a history of destroying wetlands would be exempt from a proposed law to protect isolated bogs in South Carolina.

The S.C. Department of Transportation, which has filled hundreds of acres of wetlands in the past decade, would not need state permits to pave isolated wetlands that get in the way of new roads, according to bills approved by key House and Senate committees this week.

That could mean roads, such as the proposed I-73 to Myrtle Beach would be built more quickly.

But a change in the law also could prevent the state environmental agency from overseeing isolated wetlands for road projects — and that ultimately could hurt water quality or scare off valuable wildlife, critics say.

The state DOT routinely destroys more wetlands for roads than individual landowners do for homesites or commercial development, state records show.

With just two weeks left before the legislative session ends, getting approval of either wetlands bill will likely go down to the wire. A late attempt to pass a bill is expected next week, but Sens. Phil Leventis, D-Sumter, and Arthur Ravenel, R-Charleston, have vowed to fight it.

Isolated wetlands are soggy depressions, such as Carolina Bays, that aren't directly connected to rivers or other water bodies. More than 300,000 acres of isolated wetlands dot the state, mostly between Columbia and the coast, regulators say.

Unlike other types of wetlands, such as river swamps, isolated wetlands are not protected by the federal government in South Carolina.

But like other wetlands, isolated bogs filter polluted stormwater, provide wildlife habitat and control flooding. So the state is trying to enact a permitting program like one the federal government has for other types of wetlands. That would allow the state to decide if filling an isolated wetland is warranted.

Some lawmakers say the DOT needs a break from the new wetlands rules so it can build much-needed roads for South Carolina.

"You need to have some exemption for the DOT, or you'd never build any highways," Sen. Yancey McGill, D-Williamsburg, said.

Critics said the exemption is a license for the department to wantonly destroy isolated wetlands, which became vulnerable to unregulated development because of a 2001 U.S. Supreme Court ruling. Environmental groups say the entire wetlands bill opens too many loopholes for development of isolated wetlands, including the DOT exemption.

"It gives a legal free pass to the single biggest wetlands impacter in the state," said Blan Holman, an attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center.

The Transportation Department was legally permitted to fill more than 250 acres of wetlands from 1999 through 2001 under the federal wetlands permitting program, the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control reported Thursday.

The next highest wetlands acreage approved for filling was 19 acres for a development project in Beaufort County, according to DHEC, which opposes the wetlands bills.

In the 1990s, the DOT received federal permission to destroy more than 450 acres of coastal bogs for two new freeways near Myrtle Beach.

In the past year, the Southern Environmental Law Center has put the agency on notice that it intends to sue over the loss of additional wetlands along the Carolina Bays Parkway in Horry County. Other states, such as North Carolina, do not grant blanket exemptions for state highway agencies to fill isolated wetlands without permits, Holman said.

The Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee voted for the wetlands bill Thursday and sent it to the full Senate for consideration. Earlier in the week, the House Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee attached the wetlands bill to a Catawba River bill and sent it to the House for approval.

DOT legislative liaison Michael Covington said his agency needs the wetlands exemption to make sure highway projects don't get bogged down in permitting disputes. Covington said highway projects already are subject to federal environmental review.

"It would add another layer of permitting in an already cumbersome permitting process," Covington said after the meeting. "We have, right now, over \$100 million in construction projects that are awaiting approval of various types of environmental permits."

Reach Fretwell at (803) 771-8537 or sfretwell@thestate.com

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Posted on Thu, May. 20, 2004

State works to buy top of Sassafras Mountain

Associated Press

GREENVILLE, S.C. - The state's Heritage Trust Board has authorized its staff to work out a deal to preserve the top of Sassafras Mountain, the state's highest peak at 3,560 feet.

Many residents fear that if the state doesn't buy the land, it could be sold to a private developer - as Duke and its subsidiaries have done along Lake Keowee and Highway 11.

The state wants to buy the two acres at the top of the mountain from Duke Energy.

"The main thing we don't know is what the owner will sell it for and what it would be worth on the market," said Tom Kohlsaat, the trust's director.

The property is one of three main tracts left out of the Jocassee Gorges purchase, which preserved 32,000 acres in northern Pickens and Oconee counties. About 5,000 acres on the North Carolina side of the mountain are owned by U.S. Rep. Charles Taylor, R-N.C. - a tree farmer who regularly receives the ire of environmental groups for his congressional voting record.

He bought the land 20 years ago from Champion International Paper Co. for \$1.9 million.

Pickens County residents who frequent Sassafras have feared for years that Taylor would buy the two acres from Duke, allowing him to develop and close off access to the peak.

The state is in preliminary discussions, according to Mike Willis, a spokesman for the Department of Natural Resources.

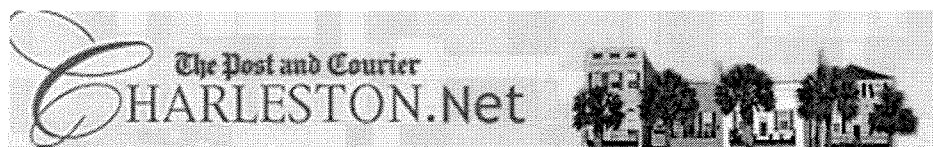
Duke Energy would not comment on land sale negotiations, said spokesman Tim Pettit.

DNR staff will now study the site and prepare a report. Before the land can switch hands, five groups must endorse the deal including the Heritage Trust board, the full DNR board, the Budget and Control Board, the Joint Bond Review Committee and the Legislature.

Gov. Mark Sanford has insisted that public money not be used to purchase the land during lean budget times, but spokesman Will Folks said the governor supports purchasing the land with private money.

Information from: The Greenville News, <http://www.greenvillenews.com>

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Tuition going up at MUSC

Students to face mounting debts

BY JONATHAN MAZE

Of The Post and Courier Staff

When Valerie Bush entered pharmacy school at the Medical University of South Carolina three years ago, tuition for a semester amounted to \$2,900.

On Thursday, MUSC's board approved a 20 percent tuition increase for next year, meaning Bush will pay \$4,439 a semester, 53 percent more than when she started school.

"It's a little frightening to think of how much I'll owe," Bush, a Tennessee native and Clemson University graduate, said of her student loans. "But I will pay them off."

If it's any consolation, she will have plenty of company. The board approved increasing tuition at each of the university's six colleges an average of nearly 15 percent.

Dental students, still recovering from news a month ago that they'll have to start paying a \$2,500 annual fee next year, will see tuition go up nearly 22 percent. Tuition at the university's four other colleges will go up anywhere from 8.6 percent to 14.8 percent.

Such increases have become as common in higher education as lectures and all-night study sessions. At MUSC, the board has approved double-digit tuition increases every year since 1992.

During the 1999-2000 school year, in-state medical students paid \$9,000 in tuition. Next year, they'll pay more than double that: \$18,600.

Even before the increases approved yesterday, MUSC medical school tuition was higher than the national average. This year, a full year of medical school costs \$16,460 at MUSC. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, the median public medical school tuition is \$14,554.

University officials say they have little choice but to raise tuition. Health care costs have skyrocketed, and during the past several years, MUSC's hospital has been less able to help offset the cost of the university.

A bigger factor has been declining state support. The university has seen state funding drop by \$28 million since 2001 and expects another \$1.5 million cut next year.

"The financial reality is that this institution has to behave more like a private institution," said Dr. John Raymond, MUSC's provost. "That also means that students have to pay higher tuition."

It's not just a South Carolina problem. Nationwide, public medical school tuition is now nearly four times as high as it was 20 years ago, according to the AAMC.

A typical student now leaves a public medical college with more than \$100,000 in debt, the association says, more than four times as much as two decades ago.

Various organizations are expressing alarm. In March, the South Carolina Medical Association urged medical schools to try to do a better job of holding down tuition increases. And last month, the AAMC announced an effort to look for ways to reduce the cost of medical education.

Health officials say the impact reaches beyond students. Medical students saddled with heavy debt are more likely to choose higher-paying specialties, which means they're not entering fields such as psychiatry or pediatrics where compensation isn't as high. That, in turn, may lead to shortages in certain specialties.

At MUSC, the typical dental student leaves school with \$120,000 in debt, said David Hicklin, a Spartanburg native and president of the university's chapter of the American Student Dental Association.

As a result, Hicklin said, students are less likely to work in rural and poor areas where a dentist shortage is more acute. Instead, they feel a need to set up their practices in more populated areas where the potential for greater income is higher.

Bush said she isn't letting her debt influence her career choices. When she graduates, she'll begin a residency to go into clinical pharmacy at a place such as a hospital, which will require her to defer paying off her loans. But she said many of her classmates choose to go into retail pharmacy immediately after graduation so they can pay their student loans.

Raymond acknowledged those concerns and added that rising tuition can put higher education out of reach for people with low incomes. Because of that, he said, the university next year will establish a new \$400,000 scholarship fund.

Most of that, \$340,000, will be used to fund scholarships of at least \$1,000 to students in need, Raymond said, noting that the university's budget situation will determine whether the program is extended.

Even so, Raymond defended the increases, saying some medical schools charge more but offer less to their students.

At the pharmacy and dental schools, budget shortfalls are especially acute. Because of state funding cuts, both colleges have spent what they had in reserve and are running annual deficits.

For dental students, the 22 percent increase is the second shoe to drop after the new \$2,500 fee. A year's worth of tuition at the college now will cost close to \$12,000.

Combined, the tuition increase and the fee add up to a more than \$4,000 increase in dental education for in-state students next year.

John Sanders, who will be interim dean of the college in July, noted the increase is necessary to erase a \$500,000 budget deficit. State appropriations, which funded 80 percent of the college's budget in the mid-1990s, now cover just 31 percent of the college's budget.

"We're trying to reach a balanced budget next year," said Sanders, whose daughter plans to attend the dental school next year.

Students say they don't blame the university for the tuition increases, calling it a necessary evil that will keep MUSC competitive with other institutions as the state reduces higher-education funding.

"They're doing what they have to do to maintain the quality of the program," said Bush. "I know times are tight."

Still, she worries about the institution's future if the state doesn't beef up funding at some point.

"There's going to be a point where it'll be impossible to raise tuition without losing students to other colleges," Bush said. "We'll be less competitive."

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School choice dead this year

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Gov. Mark Sanford and lawmakers

should come back next year with

stronger school choice legislation.

State lawmakers handed Gov. Mark Sanford a major defeat last week by refusing to approve the governor's ambitious school choice initiative. However, House Ways and Means Committee members left open the possibility that Sanford's "Put Parents in Charge" bill might stand a better chance of garnering support after lawmakers have a year to study the initiative.

It's understandable that lawmakers would want more time to consider such a potentially far-reaching measure that would provide tax credits for parents to send their children to private school or home school them. But it's equally true that students in failing schools need more options now.

Lawmakers, to their credit, drew attention to some of the bill's shortcomings. Most notably, committee chairman Bobby Harrell, R-Charleston, expressed concern about the lack of accountability for private schools. Under Sanford's plan, those schools would continue to enjoy freedom from many state guidelines. Private school supporters believe that independence helps the schools to flourish. But in other states, a lack of state oversight for school choice programs has resulted in some educators hired without criminal background checks and some financial scandals in private schools.

Under the bill, private schools benefiting from taxpayer money also would not have to prove, through standardized testing or another means of measuring academic achievement, that students are learning. Another drawback is the plan would provide subsidies not only to parents of modest means but also to upper middle-income parents. A single parent with a child could earn up to \$75,000 of taxable income. The income requirements should be lowered to provide the credits only for families who truly

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In two years, parents who already send children to private school or home school their children would begin to qualify for the tax credits. That could place a huge burden on the state budget at a time of scarce funding.

Despite these problems, school choice is an idea whose time has come for South Carolina. School choice would offer more hope to struggling students and provide a strong incentive to public schools to shape up or face the prospect of an exodus of students to private schools.

Now that the bill has died in the House, Sanford should work closely with legislative leaders to produce a bill that will gain strong support. Next year, lawmakers shouldn't fail to approve a revised "Put Parents in Charge" bill that will offer greater educational opportunity to those students who are poorly served by public schools.



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